

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY KINGDOM 27

lord living in the capital would have appointed several representatives to this particular fief because it had grown so big. Such fiefs were the ones most likely to fall prey to sub-division at the death of a king and appointment of a new one. For at this time the incoming monarch had to reward his chief supporters with grants of new fiefs.

As in the pre-nineteenth century the political hierarchy served as an appeal court system, and at the very top of the local fief hierarchy the junior lords shared adjudication with the most senior local leader whatever his rank. Usually these very senior political leaders of the fief had koranic scholars, or mallams, who gave legal advice. Serious cases such as homicide were referred immediately to the capital.

The other variety of fief, that based on birth into a particular group, or *jili* is less well understood. The word "*jili*" refers to variety or kind. The people speak of this or that *jili* of soil, or tree, or person. In using it to refer to a person they give his territorial or settlement background, or ethnic group, or his clan grouping if this differs from his territorial classification. Thus a person can have several *jili*—ethnic, territorial, or clan. Even patrilineal lineage affiliation can be described under this term. Nomadic groups in Bornu were represented as *jili* in the Shehu's court by a big lord of the *jili* (*chima kura jilibe*); this man was, in effect, the fief-holder responsible for the nomad group. Sometimes he was a leader of the group itself, and at other times he was a trusted Kanuri follower of the monarch. In both cases the big lord of the *jili* administered the group through his own representative in the group who was, unlike the territorial grouping, the local leader of a nomad clan, or a sub-tribe. Sometimes entire tribal groupings came under one jurisdiction, and at other times or in other sections of the state the tribe would be broken down into subsections based on clan groupings with one or more clans under a single fief-holder or big lord of the *jili*.

This double fief system allowed the nineteenth-century Bornu government the organizational means of administering both the settled and nomadic populations of Bornu. It also did something else very important, for it allowed the government effective control over the population even when natural disasters such as outbreaks of disease or sudden invasions sent the people into flight. If a large set of settlements had grown up in one territory from an original one, and this area was then beset by some disaster, which made the people flee in several directions, they were still thought of as a *jili* or a single variety of persons. They were still organized under their old lords, and their old leaders still retained over them some powers of taxation and demands of loyalty. If the entire kingdom was in an uproar—as it was during the Fulani wars at the beginning of the century with people fleeing in all directions—then old leaders, or former leaders, could muster their scattered followers as *jili*, and the political integration of the kingdom remained intact and viable until new settlements stabilized locally, and the territorial-based fief system could re-assert itself.

Complicating the system was the settlement of groups with fiefs through permission granted by the big lord in the capital. He could be approached by the leaders of a group of craftsmen, or kinsmen, or people of the same ethnic extraction, who requested of him that they be allowed to settle in one of his fiefs. In this case, the special group was directly under the jurisdiction of the lord through his local administrator, the junior lord, who dealt with their headman. In later generations,

425 practice is undergoing change. House plots in desirable loca-
241 tions in Maiduguri, the capital city, are bought and sold,
178 though in theory land for one's house is obtained in the same
manner as farm land--by asking the village head for a site to
build one's house.

2. Subsistence Economy and Cash Crops.

243 Millet is the staple crop of the Kanuri, and both sorghum
(*Sorghum vulgare*) and pearl millet (*Pennisetum spicatum*) are
243 grown. Planting takes place immediately after the first rains
221 in May and the grain is harvested in September. The growing
season is short as rain falls only in the months between May
and September and not at all for the remainder of the year.
Consequently there is only one crop during the year. Since
millet grows without much attention, agricultural labor is
[462] needed only during planting, weeding, and harvesting. Men and
women work together in the fields during these periods. Crops
must be sown shortly after the onset of the rains for the grow-
ing time is relatively short and any delay in planting might
reduce the exposure to rainfall which is necessary for a good
harvest. Late planting in a year in which the total rainfall
• [731] is slight can be disastrous for a family. Really bad years can
mean famine, and though there has not been a major famine since
World War I, that famine is remembered as a catastrophe. Older
people calculate their age in relation to the year of the fam-
ine. In the villages millet which a family harvests in Septem-